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Photo Contest Celebrates Life-Changing Study Abroad

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Photo Contest Celebrates Life-Changing Study Abroad

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Illinois Wesleyan University's annual **study abroad** photo contest celebrates students who recently lived and studied outside of the United States.

Stacey Shimizu, the director of the International Office, said **the contest** provides returned study abroad students with the opportunity to reflect on, share and celebrate their experiences. "Students return from what has been a transformative time and they want to talk about it, but don't quite know how to encapsulate it in short bites," Shimizu said. Entering the contest forces students to sort through their experiences to select images and moments that were either highlights or representative of their larger experience, she said.



Molly Willeford '16 submitted a winning photo from her time in South Africa.

Shimizu said research indicates study abroad has clear academic benefits, from language skills to experience in different approaches to learning. The real power of study abroad, however, lies in the personal development that students undergo.

"Putting themselves in unfamiliar and at times uncomfortable, but not unsafe, situations allows students to stretch new emotional muscles and discover hidden potential within themselves," said Shimizu. "Everything is a learning experience, and learning once again becomes natural and fun. In some ways, it's like being a child again."

Contest winner Molly Willeford '16 agreed that her time in Cape Town, South Africa, was transformative. She remarked that she discovered a great deal of independence within herself during her time studying abroad. "I felt more comfortable going out and doing things on my own, which is something I never thought I'd feel comfortable doing," she said. "I've become a much stronger person that I ever thought I was, and it took leaving the [U.S.] to figure that out."



Madz Negro '16 won "People's Choice" for her photo from Panama.

Other **winners** included Nicole Chlebek '16 (Lombard, Ill.), an environmental studies and sociology double major, who was selected as the "Judges Choice" winner for her photo of her host mother in Tanzania; Madz Negro '16 (New Berlin, Ill.), environmental studies and music double major, "People's Choice" winner for her photo of a sunset in Panama; Willeford '16 (Minooka, Ill.), International Studies and political science double major, winner in "The Road Less Traveled" category, for her photo of her six-year-old host sister in Tshabo, South Africa; Kristina Dehlin '16 (Bartlett, Ill.), English-writing and philosophy double major, winner in "The Sights" category for her photo of the Paris skyline; Elizabeth Sanders '16 (Carpentersville, Ill.), anthropology and International Studies double major, "Street Art" category winner for her photo of art in a Berlin subway; and Megan Win '16 (Frankfort, Ill.), music and psychology double major, in the "Something to Celebrate" category for her photo of Sunday lunch with her host family in Copenhagen.



Nicole Chlebek '16 won "Judges' Choice" for her photo of her host mother in Tanzania.

Traditionally about 50 percent of Illinois Wesleyan students participate in an international education experience. Illinois Wesleyan offers international opportunities from more than 300 global programs in over 70 different countries.

By Lydia Hartlaub '16